

Message Text

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12

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5463

INFO AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 2235

E.O. 11652: EXGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, AS, CB, VS

SUBJECT: VISIT OF AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION TO PHMON
PENH AND SAIGON

1. SUMMARY: DEPUTY COUNTRY PARTY LEADER SINCLAIR, SHADOW FOREIGN MINISTER, MHR ANDREW PEACOCK, AND COUNTRY PARTY MHR JOHN SULLIVAN BRIEFED EMBOFF AT APRIL 10 LUNCHEON ON THEIR RECENT TRIP TO PHNOM PENH AND SAIGON, APRIL 1-6. ALL THREE WERE CONVINCED THAT THE MILITARY SITUATION IN BOTH PLACES WAS HOPELESS AND THAT THEY WOULD CONCENTRATE THEIR EFFORTS ON INCREASING AUSTRALIAN HUMANITARIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO BOTH COUNTRIES AND IN SEEKING TO SCORE PARTISAN POLITICAL POINTS OFF THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT. BOTH SINCLAIR AND PEACOCK EXPRESSED THEIR DISLIKE FOR DFA PERMANENT SECRETARY ALAN RENOUF AND SAID HE AND OTHER PRO-ALP MEMBERS OF DFA WOULD BE DISMISSED WHEN THE OPPOSITION REGAINED CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY

2. OPPOSITION PARLIAMENTARY LEADERS WHO VISITED PHNOM PENH AND SAIGON APRIL 1-6 (IAN SINCLAIR, ANDREW PEACOCK, AND JOHN SULLIVAN) DISCUSSED THEIR TRIP WITH EMBOFF APRIL 11. ALSO PRESENT AT LUNCHEON MEETING WERE GVN AMBASSADOR CANG AND GKR CHARGE THEAM. THE MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY DELE-
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GATION WERE MOVED AND BEWILDERED AS TO HOW TO REACT TO

WHAT THEY SAW IN PHNOM PENH AND SAIGON. THEIR INITIAL INTENT HAD BEEN TO PRESS THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO THE KHMER AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE, BUT WHAT THEY SAW CONVINCED THEM THAT THE MILITARY SITUATION IN BOTH COUNTRIES WAS HOPELESS AND THAT A COMMUNIST TAKE-OVER IN BOTH COUNTRIES WAS MERELY A MATTER OF TIME. THEY WERE VERY CONCERNED THAT THE PRESS SEEMED TO BE CONCENTRATING ON EVENTS IN SAIGON AND NOT PAYING ENOUGH ATTENTION TO THE TRAGIC SITUATION IN PHNOM PENH. ALL MEMBERS OF THE GROUP EXPRESSED GREAT ADMIRATION FOR AMBASSADOR DEAN AND FSO PETER COLLINS IN PHNOM PENH WHO WERE DESCRIBED AS QUOTE THE BEST THAT AMERICA COULD PRODUCE. END QUOTE.

3. THE GROUP WAS VERY ANNOYED BY THE TREATMENT THEY RECEIVED FROM AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY OFFICIALS THEY MET IN BANGKOK AND SAIGON. SINCLAIR'S PRIVATE SECRETARY, ADRIAN LYNCH, SAID QUOTE WE NEARLY GOT FROSTBITE WHENEVER WE MET OFFICIAL AUSTRALIANS. END QUOTE IN THIS CONNECTION THE GROUP EXPRESSED THEIR CONTEMPT FOR DFA SECRETARY ALAN RENOUF. SINCLAIR STATED FLATLY THAT WHEN THE OPPOSITION CAME TO POWER, RENOUF AND OTHER PRO-ALP MEMBERS OF THE DFA WOULD BE DISMISSED. MHR PEACOCK AGREED. LATER IN THE DAY OPPOSITION LEADER FRASER ISSUED A PUBLIC STATEMENT IN WHICH HE SAID THAT RENOUF HAD BROKEN A CARDINAL RULE OF THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE BY GIVING POLITICAL SUPPORT TO THE GOVERNMENT AND MAKING A POLITICAL ATTACK ON THE OPPOSITION. THIS WAS IN RESPONSE TO A REPORTED STATEMENT BY RENOUF IN WHICH HE SAID THAT OPPOSITION CRITICISMS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S INDOCHINA RELIEF EFFORTS WERE UNFAIR.

4. THE GROUP WAS ALSO CONCERNED BY THE MANNER IN WHICH THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT WAS HANDLING ITS HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE TO INDOCHINA. THEY FELT CANBERRA WAS TRYING TO OVERSEE THE OPERATION OF THE C-130S FROM THE DFA AND THAT AS A RESULT ESSENTIAL FLIGHTS WERE BEING UNDULY DELAYED. THEY ALSO BELIEVED THAT THE GOA HAD BEEN TRYING TO MILK PUBLICITY FROM THE SHIPMENT OF ORPHANS FROM SAIGON TO AUSTRALIA, WHEN IN FACT THE ACTUAL OPERATION HAD BEEN FOULED UP BY BUREAUCRATIC SNAFUS.

5. THE OPPOSITION NOW PLANS TO USE VENTS IN VIETNAM TO PRODUCE
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THE GOVERNMENT TO DO MORE TO ASSIST REFUGEES IN CAMBODIA AND SOUTH VIETNAM. PEACOCK ALSO SAID THAT THE EVENTS IN INDOCHINA HAD DESTROYED THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT'S PREMISE THAT AUSTRALIA FACED NO DISCERNIBLE EXTERNAL THREAT TO ITS SECURITY FOR THE NEXT FIFTEEN YEARS. THE OPPOSITION PLANS TO HIT THE GOVERNMENT HARD ON THIS ISSUE IN THE WEEKS AND MONTHS AHEAD.

6. AS NOTED ABOVE, THE VIETNAMESE AMBASSADOR AND THE CAMBODIAN CHARGE WERE ALSO GUESTS AT THE LUNCHEON AND RESEMBLED GHOSTS AT A BANQUET. BOTH WERE DEPRESSED AND DISPIRITED AND THE CAMBODIAN WAS CLOSE TO TEARS AND SEVERAL OCCASIONS. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THEM AND THE VIGOROUS AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS WAS PAINFUL, AND THE BRUTAL FRANKNESS WITH WHICH THE AUSTRALIANS DESCRIBED THE PROBABLE MILITARY OUTCOME IN INDOCHINA DID LITTLE TO RAISE THEIR SPIRITS.
GREEN

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